

conciliation  
resources

## **Perilous border:**

Sudanese communities affected by  
conflict on the Sudan-Uganda border

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## Map of Sudan

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# SUMMARY

1

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is conventionally considered by outsiders to be a Ugandan issue, with its Sudanese dimension poorly understood and often overlooked. This is the first study of how armed conflict by the LRA and other armed groups has affected Sudanese communities living along the Sudan-Uganda border. It documents local people's views from the LRA-affected areas of Eastern and Central Equatoria on the conflicts, the current security and development situation, and on reintegration, reconciliation, accountability and cross-border relations. It provides insight into some of the profound challenges for peacebuilding and statebuilding in Southern Sudan and its border areas and suggests issues that need to be addressed.

Border communities were drawn into both the north-south conflict in Sudan and the LRA conflict. Some were involved as fighters (voluntary or forced) in the armed groups and many were victims of forces that often targeted civilians. Consequently, the overwhelming majority have experienced the violence of war.

Yet almost four years after the signing of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), there is growing frustration in these communities that the expected 'peace dividend' has not yet materialized. Development remains elusive amid widespread insecurity. There is no overarching strategy and few programmes promote reintegration of demobilized fighters, returning refugees and internally displaced persons. Existing efforts are insufficient to address the scale of psychosocial and development needs. State institutions appear largely absent in the lives of many, underscoring the challenges of building a truly inclusive and responsive state. Furthermore the wars have left a legacy of traumatized and fragmented communities whose recovery is complicated by ongoing conflict and insecurity.

## **Decentralization of insecurity: current patterns of tension and violence**

Neither the end of the north-south conflict nor the LRA peace process brought stability to border communities, although the dynamics of insecurity have changed. Four major factors are at play.

1. The failure of the Juba peace talks to conclusively end the LRA conflict generates widespread fear that this most violent of groups may return. This fear may be well founded, given recent events in Western Equatoria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic.
2. Much current tension arises from inadequate reintegration programmes to support communities with returning refugees and demobilized fighters. The differential treatment of those who stayed, left or fought leads to grievances, made more acute by poverty.

3. 'Banditry' and cattle raiding is thriving, with state security forces unable to protect the population.
4. Disputes between ethnic groups over land ownership and grazing rights are increasingly marked by violence, escalating in part due to unreconciled hostilities from the war years when armed groups divided communities.

While distinctive measures are needed to address each of these conditions, they are interlinked and will require a wide-ranging strategy to create the basis for lasting peace.

## **Security: a necessary precondition for peace and development**

Insecurity – whether real or perceived – restricts everyday movement, severely impedes development and clouds the vision needed to work towards a more desirable future. Local communities have low expectations of state institutions for providing protection and stability. Instead, many perceive security forces as either ineffective or as actively contributing to a volatile environment. They conclude they must defend themselves. Civilian protection and wider security therefore remain a key issue for security sector reform and a fundamental challenge for statebuilding.

## **Destroyed livelihoods, fragmented communities**

Decades of war have destroyed what little there was of basic infrastructure, eroded livelihoods and economic activity and created a lost generation without formal education. Community cohesion is undermined by grief, painful memories, extensive alcoholism and drug abuse, and lack of direction. Inter-generational rifts are triggered by the violence, particularly with youth who fought in armed groups and now question the traditional authority of elders.

There are too few continuous initiatives to help invigorate development. Instead insecurity inhibits reconstruction. Increased security along with a concerted and well-resourced development effort that involves local communities in efforts to build basic infrastructure – such



A boy studying in bombed-out Magwi school on a Saturday morning, while demining operations continued outside.

as roads, schools, clinics – could be a catalyst for both material improvements and to help restore the hope necessary to generate momentum behind peacebuilding.

### **Reconciliation, accountability, and compensation**

Finding ways of dealing with the past confronts all border communities. With respect to the LRA, there is pervasive bewilderment about being caught in a 'Ugandan' conflict, and a resulting belief that Ugandans should take responsibility. Yet there is also tacit recognition of the complex and ambiguous relationship between local Sudanese and the LRA, some of whom share a language and culture. While most Sudanese experienced the LRA's violence, some maintained close ties for protection, economic benefits or sympathy, and others were forcibly abducted and incorporated into the LRA. This history still causes intra- and inter-community tension as well as resentment and hostility towards Uganda. A comprehensive strategy therefore needs to address the distinctive yet interconnected local and international dimensions.

Most argued it is 'too early' to speak of reconciliation with the LRA without a final resolution of the conflict and disbanding of the LRA. Past failed attempts to promote inter-community reconciliation in the absence of peace led to cynicism of organized reconciliation efforts. Many believe that while their communities can handle reconciliation and accountability for crimes among community members, they think the respective governments should address reconciliation and accountability for LRA crimes – especially

for the 'Ugandan LRA' as distinct from its minority Sudanese members. Yet there are few demands to hold violators to account through formal judicial processes and most are silent on issues like the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants of the LRA leadership. Instead there is widespread consensus on the need for clear acknowledgement of wrongdoing accompanied by material restitution. Many argue the Ugandan government or Ugandans generally should take responsibility for compensating communities drawn into 'their' war.

While there is consensus on compensation, views on who should benefit and how it should be paid are varied. A key issue is whether it should be offered to *individuals*, especially in the form of school fees and training, or *communally* through rebuilding schools, clinics and other facilities or development packages. Another concern is the need to establish places to mourn the dead and other forms of memorial, such as schools named in honour of those killed or orchards that can promote healing through cultivation. While communities could initiate such memorials, offering the needed resources as a form of reparation could help reconciliation. Such measures should be designed in consultation with communities.

### **Reintegration of the LRA**

Most communities place high priority on 'bringing home' community members who were in the LRA, particularly as they recognize the majority were forced to participate. Yet there is little clarity on how to successfully reintegrate them

and few strategies and resources to address the profound psychosocial challenges of rehabilitation. Considerable creativity and resources have been devoted to reintegrating and rehabilitating the LRA in Uganda but not in Sudan. Little attention has also been given to creating incentives for Sudanese LRA to come out from the bush, despite potentially useful lessons from experiences in Uganda. There is clearly a gap in strategies, programmes and resources to address the needs of Sudanese caught up in the LRA conflict as fighters or as refugees and to enabling their communities to support their return.

### **Refugee return**

Most people living in border communities fled at some point during the wars, either to become internally displaced or refugees, mainly in Kenya and Uganda. The current push to encourage return is marked by different benefits and services for those who left and those who remained. This generates tension. Returnees from refugee camps are used to receiving monthly provisions and access to schooling and basic health care. They are now anxious about future provisions when their resettlement package is depleted. Yet these provisions are still more than what is usually offered to the internally displaced or to those who remained in their home communities and were impoverished by the conflicts. Refugees had greater opportunities and now tend to be better qualified for whatever jobs exist, while those who stayed are increasingly excluded. A key challenge is to create more equitable and conflict sensitive rehabilitation that addresses the needs of all war-affected groups and promotes cohesion.

### **Cross-border relations: causes for concern and opportunities for peacebuilding**

Connections with Uganda are both a source of tension and a lifeline for border communities. While they potentially benefit from cross-border trade, civilians feel vulnerable to attacks by the LRA and elements of the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) fighting LRA on Sudanese territory.

- **Border demarcation and UPDF presence:** Local communities are highly suspicious of UPDF activities, as some elements have been implicated in human rights abuses. They do not understand the UPDF's current mandate and fear its operations enable a Ugandan land grab along the unclearly marked border. Urgent action is needed to ensure high professional conduct by UPDF forces, to clarify and communicate its mandate to local communities, and to ensure its bases do not disadvantage customary land users.

- **Cross-border economic activity:** There is great potential for cooperation and growth. Yet trade is stymied by lack of transparent and fair border procedures and affordable fees. The war years have also weakened the role of traditional markets in border communities. Key to development will be strategies to restore these markets and create more conducive conditions for legitimate cross-border economic activity.
- **Joint planning and cooperation:** Opportunities for joint action to address common problems is undermined by inadequate cross-border coordination between local authorities and development actors. Greater attention is needed to establish practical cooperation and joint initiatives across the border, possibly leading to a sub-regional development plan.
- **Cross-border reconciliation and engagement through face-to-face exchanges:** War has undermined trust and confidence between people historically interconnected across the international boundary. Long-term foundations for peace and development are likely to be improved through ongoing cross-border initiatives between those involved in similar sorts of business, socio-economic and cultural roles.

### **Cross-border framework for peacebuilding**

The unresolved conflict between the LRA and Ugandan government undermines prospects for peace in Southern Sudan and the wider region. Consequently, local people in the border communities feel they are unable to experience the fruits of the CPA. While efforts are clearly needed to find a lasting settlement, there is also an urgent need to address its impact for people on the ground.

- International donors and agencies have invested comparatively little in the Sudanese LRA-affected regions. Ignoring these areas has the potential to fuel resentment as well as leave an important part of the conflict system unresolved.
- The study reveals the need for a comprehensive framework for security, development and compensation of conflict-affected communities in ways that promote development and improved relations. The Uganda and Southern Sudan governments, with the international community's assistance, should lead in developing such a framework. Yet civil society organizations, religious and cultural leaders can play key roles in identifying needs, opportunities and methods for designing and implementing a comprehensive plan.

# Methodology

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This study looks at the current situation in various places along the border, chosen because they were most affected by LRA activity between 1994 and 2007. It focuses on several questions:

- To what extent were communities affected by LRA violence or violence by other armed groups (OAGs)?
- To what extent are communities still affected by violence?
- What are the greatest challenges to establishing a peaceful environment?
- How does the proximity to the border affect communities?
- What visions do communities have to establish a culture of peace, including living with those who have committed violent acts against them?
- How does the community view the concept of reconciliation?

Field research for this report was conducted over three weeks in June 2008 in parts of Sudan's LRA-affected areas of Eastern and Central Equatoria. More specifically, the research team visited the following groups:

**Lolubo** in Juba County (Aru-Kubi, Aru Junction and Lokiliri *payam*)

**Acholi** in Magwi County (Panykwara, Magwi, Obbo, Palotaka and Parajok)

**Lango** in Ikotos County (Ikotos, Imatong and Tseretenya)

**Lokoya** in Juba County (Lyria)

Interviews in the Madi area of Pageri had to be cancelled due to alleged insecurity. The area researched does not cover all groups and regions affected by the LRA.

The team of four Sudanese researchers (at times helped by local residents) conducted 169 interviews. Interviewees were chosen randomly by walking to, for example, each fifth household (depending on village size) and interviewing the most senior person of the household at home. The interviews were semi-structured, covering the war experience and thoughts on the current situation, on the relationship with Uganda and a vision for the future.

Questions dealing with 'reconciliation' and 'compensation' were asked in an extremely open manner, avoiding using those actual words. The guidance questions for these topics were:

- "What do you think about the LRA and Uganda?",
- "What should happen now?"
- "What were your expectations about returning home?"

In addition, information in this report is drawn from 39 in-depth interviews or group discussions with local leaders, government officials, politicians and members of mostly civil society-led 'peace committees'. The research also draws on findings from earlier fieldwork in the area conducted between 2006 and 2008. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity to allow them to speak freely about sensitive issues.

While the report presents some numeric data to give an overview of, for example, how many people have suffered the loss of a family member during the war, it does not attempt to quantify the findings. There are several reasons for this. In some areas, interviewing was very difficult and residents of the same village have conflicting memories about how many people were killed or in which year an attack took place. Since areas known to have suffered numerous attacks were specifically visited, the numbers are not representative for the entire state of Eastern or Central Equatoria. Local records were not always kept continuously during the war and it has become almost impossible to reliably trace how many people were killed by which armed group or how many Sudanese have been abducted by the LRA. Many who fled Sudan because of the LRA were also then attacked by the LRA in Uganda, blurring the line between Sudanese and Ugandan war experiences even further. Nonetheless, the numbers give an idea of the impact of the LRA and other armed groups. The focus is hence on qualitative statements made by local residents to understand the depth of the war experience and how people view their current situation and needs.

# Caught in the middle: border communities' experience of conflict and violence

3

"Behind us it's dark. In front of us it's dark. We are in the middle."

*Ikotos resident*

Sudanese civilians living in Central and Eastern Equatoria along the Uganda-Sudan border have for decades suffered violence and insecurity caused by numerous conflicts.

War was – and is – fought on many fronts. Engulfed in Sudan's north-south war, they were also party to numerous factionalized armed groups, caught in the LRA conflict and subject to localized violent inter-ethnic disputes and violent crime.

Officially, the warring Sudanese parties signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. In addition, one of the main perpetrators of violence, the LRA, has left the area and shifted its bases westward to Western Equatoria along the Sudan-Democratic Republic of Congo border. The Southern Sudan government has facilitated peace negotiations between the Ugandan government and the LRA since 2006. But in the absence of a conclusive peace settlement and disarmament, local people feel a constant threat that the LRA might return to their area. This anxiety is complemented by widespread insecurity due to localized violence and a lack of law and order or civilian protection. This chapter maps some of these dynamics to provide a backdrop to the local perspectives on these events and the current situation that are explored in the following chapters.

## 3.1 The north-south conflict

The overarching war has been the 'north-south conflict' that erupted into violence even before Sudan's independence in 1956. The civil war that began in 1983 was fought between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the government in Khartoum. Central and Eastern Equatoria became frontlines in this war between two armies, with traditionally integrated communities divided across enemy lines.

The southern Sudanese were never united in the war against Khartoum. It is a common sentiment among Equatorians that they were never well represented, or indeed fully accepted, by the SPLA/M. In some cases the SPLA forced support from local residents while fighting the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in the Equatoria. In the 1980s and early 1990s, attacks on civilians and SPLA abductions caused many people to flee to Uganda or Kenya. Equatorian armed groups began to form against the SPLA, most notably the Equatorian Defence Forces (EDF). The government in Khartoum realized it could use such divisions to its advantage and supported anti-SPLA groups with weapons and supplies. During the negotiations that

led to the CPA in 2005, the EDF switched its alliance to the SPLA and fought their former allies, including the LRA.

## 3.2 The LRA conflict

Originating in the armed struggle between the LRA and Ugandan government, the LRA spill over into Sudan made an already complex conflict situation even more complicated and violent. In the early 1990s, LRA fighters began to cross into southern Sudan. After formally establishing a presence in Sudan in 1993-94 at the invitation of the government in Khartoum, the LRA, often alongside the government-aligned EDF, moved across vast areas of both Eastern and Central Equatoria as an allied militia to the government's SAF. This enabled it to secure a base and supplies in exchange for fighting the SPLA. It subsequently became the deadliest of the armed groups operating in Central and Eastern Equatoria. The research revealed that in some border counties, such as Magwi and Ikotos, most people experienced an attack on their village by the LRA. The effects of LRA operations are explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

The LRA's presence later drew the Ugandan army into the region. The UPDF has had an official presence in Sudan since 2002, although residents of the area report sightings of its soldiers much earlier. A Khartoum-Kampala agreement allowed the UPDF inside Sudan to fight the LRA. Local residents indicate however that they have never understood the UPDF's mandate in their area. Although its mandate officially expired in early 2006, the Ugandan army has maintained its much-disputed presence in Sudan. The interviews reveal considerable suspicion and mistrust towards the UPDF, in part due to incidents of abusive behaviour by some of its soldiers and in part because of confusion about the UPDF's objectives and perception that Uganda is encroaching on Sudanese territory – as will be explored in the final chapter.

## 3.3 Multiple attackers

The confusing mix of armed groups and frequently shifting loyalties of militias makes it very difficult to measure precisely the impact of each armed group. It is often difficult for local people to identify their attackers because the only way to survive an attack is to flee. For example when the LRA attacked Imatong in 2002, residents only found out who their attackers were when they reported the massacre to the SPLA. Some attacks are still attributed to unidentified armed groups. Bandits have also taken advantage of a murky and unclear security situation.



*Abandoned tanks in Aru-Kubi, which was renamed by the LRA as New Gulu or Kony Village, after LRA leader Joseph Kony.*

Interviewees were nevertheless asked to identify the groups that had attacked their village or camp. Of 169 people interviewed, everyone had experienced an attack by the LRA, either in Sudan or in Uganda. Sometimes the attack was only witnessed from afar. Each community had experienced several different attackers. While the EDF was often named as a group believed to have caused many problems by supporting SAF and the LRA, no respondent had experienced an attack by the EDF. Attackers identified by the interviewees in each interview location are listed in the table on page 10.

### **3.4 Cattle raiders, bandits and local disputes**

The combined presence of these armed groups has created an extremely volatile and often unsafe, lawless environment. Yet formally organized armies and armed groups are not the only source of violence experienced by the communities of Central and Eastern Equatoria. These areas also suffer from violent cattle raiding between Sudanese groups and sometimes across borders with the Turkana of Kenya and the Karamojong of Uganda. Armed criminals also operate with little hindrance, at great cost to local people.

The complex mosaic of ethnic groups, many of whom live on both sides of the international border, lends itself to fissures as well as cooperation. Long-held grudges from the war and disputes over land and grazing rights are increasingly escalating into inter-ethnic violence. In response, some communities create local armed defence forces in the absence of effective mechanisms for law enforcement or civilian protection.

Finally, the steady trickle of returnees from refugee or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps since 2007 has led to resettlement in formerly deserted areas, which has also caused conflicts in communities over scarce resources such as food, drinking water, land for settlement and grazing, and education and healthcare.

### **3.5 Continuing insecurity**

Inconclusive settlement of the LRA war, inadequate integration of fighters, some of whom remain reliant on the gun to secure their livelihoods, and the widespread use of armed violence in criminal activities and localized disputes all result in high levels of insecurity.

Table: Attackers

Aru-Kubi IDPs	<b>LRA, SAF, SPLA, Dinka, Lokoya, unidentified OAG</b>
Aru Kubi	<b>LRA, Lokoya, SPLA, unidentified bandits, UPDF</b>
Panyikwara	<b>LRA, Dinka, unidentified OAG</b>
Magwi Town	<b>LRA, SPLA, Dinka, unidentified OAG</b>
Obbo	<b>LRA, UPDF, Iyire</b>
Pajok (Parajok)	<b>LRA, UPDF, Bokec</b> (Ugandan bandits)
Ikotos	<b>LRA, UPDF</b>
Imatong Centre	<b>LRA, Latuko</b>
Lohayiro village	<b>LRA, SPLA, UPDF</b>
Tseretenya Town	<b>LRA, SPLA, Dinka/ Nuer war, UPDF, Didinga, Logir, Karamojong, unidentified OAG</b>
Lyria	<b>LRA, Murle, SPLA, unidentified OAG</b>
Lokiliri boma	<b>LRA, SPLA, SAF, Lokoro, Sodoni</b>
Sodoni village	<b>LRA, SPLA, SAF</b>

Due to this insecurity, large parts of the border area were all but deserted until recently. Marked as a no-go area for aid organizations during the war years, the area received little or no humanitarian assistance. For the same reasons, little research has been done on the situation of communities. Until today only a few international organizations have had a permanent presence on the ground working with scarce local partner organizations.

Many communities consequently survive without basic services, having to deal with destroyed families and community structures while struggling to develop a vision for the future. Outright violence is still common and the culture of war has left a destructive legacy.

Furthermore, the presence of various armies has left its legacy on the communities in LRA-affected areas. Few residents see an army presence as a sign of protection,

nor are there other civilian policing services offering such protection. Their experience has been that an army is either ineffective at protecting them or actively contributes to a volatile environment. A chief in Ikotos County said the biggest security threat his community now faces is armed cattle raiders, but SPLA soldiers do not help the community against local enemies. "We defend ourselves," he explained. "The soldiers say they are only here to fight other nations. If we are disturbed by cattle raiders, they say it is not their mission to defend us."

# The LRA conflict in Southern Sudan

4

“Because of the word Acholi, most people feel negatively about Acholi. Only if they have time to analyse, will they realize that not all LRA are Acholi and not all Acholi are LRA.” *Magwi resident*

The LRA entered an already volatile environment, causing further complications and violence, but also used the confusing security environment, shifting military alliances, local frustration about the SPLA and general lack of law and order to its advantage.

The extent to which all Sudanese are affected by war violence is staggering. In 39 interviews conducted in Aru-Kubi and Aru-Kubi IDP camp, the respondents reported a total of 107 deaths of family members during the war. Of these, 54 were killed during LRA attacks, 35 died fighting as soldiers (mainly for the SPLA), two were killed by soldiers (either SPLA or SAF) and 16 died of illness or malnutrition that could not be treated due to lack of services during the war. Some respondents also reported that family members were killed by an unknown armed group. In general, the LRA was by far the most violent group, responsible for the death of 272 family members belonging to the families of 169 interviewees (see Appendix page 36).

Because people had no other protection but what they could organize themselves, the relationship between the LRA and Sudanese citizens is complex. The LRA was the biggest threat to security and a brutal force of destruction but it was also a possible protector from other enemies. For some civilians, allying themselves by offering information, goods or even marriage with LRA members became a risky but necessary survival strategy. This caused rifts within communities that are now showing as distrust of each other. Some members feel they are blamed for LRA atrocities while others point fingers at those they see as collaborators. (see section: *Broken communities* on page 17).

Although the LRA had been fighting Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni since 1986, fighting in the early years was confined to northern Uganda. In the early 1990s the LRA moved into Sudan taking advantage of a porous border. The parts most affected by the LRA during that time stretch along the border in the states of Eastern and Central Equatoria, as well as Central Equatoria in the vicinity of Southern Sudan's capital Juba. Magwi County and part of Juba County were the first areas the LRA chose as a base, with Palotaka and Aru-Kubi as major base camps. Aru-Kubi became the LRA headquarters from 1994 – 1997, renamed 'New Gulu' or 'Kony Village' – after LRA leader Joseph Kony – by the LRA. Later on, the LRA moved to Jebel Lin and Pager and then Magwi County. While the LRA always remained a mobile force, some camps were

Mareike Schoneveld



LRA leader Joseph Kony.

semi-permanent, with cultivation and trading links to the local population or the markets in Juba. From the mid-1990s onward, the LRA also started abducting people in Sudan.

Further east, the LRA launched major attacks against villages in Ikotos County and the Imatong Mountains from 2002 onward. The town of Katire suffered possibly the most devastating single massacre by the LRA in Sudan in 2002, when an estimated 520 people were killed. Residents of Ikotos say the LRA left the area in 2005. The last LRA groups left Magwi mid-2007 to head towards Western Equatoria as part of the ongoing peace negotiations – the Juba Talks – with the Ugandan government, hosted by the Southern Sudan government. Since 2005 border areas of Western Equatoria have also been affected but were not visited for this research.

Some local authorities or leaders have kept records of attacks and destruction; in other areas the only record is people's memory. It is clear that the greatest devastation was caused by the LRA and that they were the most active of all armed groups. In Ikotos County alone, residents counted that the LRA burnt down 33 villages and killed 840 people over three years. Fifty-four people are still missing and were either killed or have been abducted, according to the records of Ikotos' South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. In Magwi County, records say 1536 residents were killed by the LRA, while 72 remain missing. During attacks, the LRA would loot a village and take everything of any use or value, and kill or abduct its residents, often for a short time only, to carry the loot. Exactly how many Sudanese are still missing and might be with the LRA remains unclear.

Throughout the 1990s the LRA also had a steady presence in government-held Juba Town and was seen regularly in town until about 2003, being openly ferried around on government trucks or trading charcoal in Juba market. Kony himself was at times living in a house in Juba. As late as 2003, one of Kony's wives delivered her third baby by Caesarean section in Juba Hospital and it was well known that she was Kony's wife. Generally speaking, the network between the LRA and government-supporting residents of Juba was particularly strong in the 1990s.

The Khartoum government enabled a relatively comfortable existence for the LRA by providing not only weapons and other supplies but by also offering physical protection in the field through SAF soldiers. In return, the LRA launched attacks on villages and destabilized large parts of Eastern and Central Equatoria. This translated to a very close military collaboration between the LRA and the SAF in the field. Khartoum also supported the LRA in its ideology, which is roughly based on the idea that Uganda's government has conducted a campaign of killing, neglect and abuse against the Acholi in northern Uganda. Khartoum, itself an opponent of President Museveni's reign, afforded the LRA material strength and ideological support in its quest to overthrow the Ugandan government.

Having its brutal tactics sanctioned and getting support in their political quest by a government contributed considerably to the LRA's view of itself as a viable political force. Khartoum also exploited the LRA on a more personal level. LRA, SPLA, social workers dealing with LRA returnees, and UPDF have confirmed that Ugandan girls and boys in the LRA were regularly taken to the households of high-ranking SAF officers to work as houseboys or become wives. Those chosen to live with SAF officers were commonly very young – it was often children too young to endure the gruelling fighting and movement with the LRA in the bush. Specific anecdotes recorded by social workers in Juba include the story of a returnee child who in 1997 was reported to have been part of a group of 300 children taken to Khartoum, some of whom went on to have a military career with the Sudanese army. One child who returned as a 12-year-old in 2000 reported, for example, that he had been a houseboy with a SAF officer for six years.

#### **4.1 The LRA and Sudanese civilians**

The early years of the LRA's presence in Sudan were not marked by hostility. Local residents remember friendly interactions in which the LRA was approachable, often a fair trading partner and at times even helpful. Its behaviour changed however with prolonged presence in Sudan,

becoming much more violent towards civilians who did not offer support. As one man in Palotaka recalls:

I saw the LRA in 1994 in Palotaka when they were not killing people. They helped the people suffering with paralysis and heal them traditionally. ... Later when the Arabs confuse [influenced and offered support to] the LRA, [the LRA] destroy the farm of [EDF leader Paul] Omoya. Then Omoya sent them away [broke up the EDF/LRA alliance] because [the LRA] have become disobedient, killing and stealing and abducting children from Uganda and Sudan to carry heavy loads.

In general, the LRA presence and the war caused loss of lives and displacement on a large scale. Entire villages were deserted due to LRA attacks. Everyone the research team spoke to had been displaced at least once by an LRA attack, some for a short time only. However the vast majority of respondents were displaced for longer periods – in some cases up to 15 years. Displacement often meant moving from one refuge to another; many ended up in Ugandan refugee camps. In many cases, Sudanese were attacked in the Ugandan camps to where they had fled. Devastating attacks in 1996 and 2002 by the LRA on Achol-Pii camp in Uganda, which hosted mainly Sudanese refugees, remain a very sore memory, as dozens of Sudanese were killed.

The history of one man from Aru-Kubi is typical of the war experience of Equatorians: He was born in Aru-Kubi, but fled to Agoro (Sudan) and then to Acwar when the LRA attacked Aru-Kubi in 1995. In 1997, he moved to Masindi in Uganda and back to Nimule in Sudan in 2001. When Nimule became unsafe in 2003, he went back to Uganda in 2004, staying in Adjumani. He returned to Aru-Kubi for the first time in March 2008, trying to resettle in his home village but found his land occupied by residents who stayed in Aru-Kubi or returnees who came before him.

It is impossible to say how many Sudanese were or are in the LRA. It was not uncommon for Sudanese children to be repatriated to Sudan by aid organizations after managing to escape in Uganda and it is clear that Sudanese have been a part of the LRA since the early 1990s. In the early Juba peace talks, the LRA stated that about 200 Sudanese were still among them. This number could never be verified. With recent waves of abductions in Western Equatoria, the number has in any case risen substantially.

We asked respondents about family members that had been abducted by the LRA – some of them still missing, others returned. A detailed breakdown can be seen in

the Appendix (see page 37), but generally the responses indicate that the number abducted over the years might be much higher than previously assumed. In total, 102 family members are still missing from the families of 169 respondents. Of those missing, 23 were abducted by forces other than the LRA. Nineteen people who were abducted by the LRA have returned over the past few years.

This however does not allow conclusions about how many Sudanese remain with the LRA. Before the LRA left Eastern and Central Equatoria in 2007 returns were few but steady. In the past two years very few Sudanese have officially returned from the LRA.

Sudanese who were in the LRA and were interviewed in depth for this study have differing experiences and memories of their time in the bush. Some say they stayed mainly in Uganda and care was taken by senior LRA commanders not to let them return to Sudan in case escape would be easier there. Others report moving freely between Sudan and Uganda, although not usually near their Sudanese home area.

The usual pattern however seemed to rotate Sudanese LRA between Uganda and southern Sudan, "working as a team with Ugandans and Sudanese", as one young man describes it. In Sudan, others report the LRA slightly changed their tactic: "In Uganda you attack [the civilians in order to] get money. In Sudan you attack [civilians and we also] fight the SPLA." He also described that in his group of about 400 to 500 people, there were "a lot of Sudanese ladies and kids. Some people speak Sudanese Luo, and some people looked like Arabs but did not speak."

Having a cultural association with the LRA has made the Sudanese Acholi feel a backlash. "The problem of the LRA is," said one Acholi in Magwi who fought for the SPLA during the war, "that people now blame all Acholi. Even if you go to speak to a Dinka, they will say all Acholi are LRA." Due to the SPLA's reputation among Equatorians, being associated with SPLA can also be damaging. The former SPLA member from Magwi also explained that some of his Acholi colleagues in the SPLA now fear the wrath of their fellow Acholi, who often harbour bad feelings against the SPLA. He said Acholi who fought in the SPLA find it hard to return home: "They were SPLA soldiers and mostly Acholi and committed wrong acts. Now they fear to come back." Residents of Panyikwara deserted their village in 1993 when the SPLA came and abducted young men to fight in the struggle. One chief remembers:

When war came, we really suffered very much. We even sent our children to join SPLA, but by the time

they [the SPLA] came they took all our crops. And they give you five cows for your child, they take the child to fight the Arabs. If you refuse, they beat you. Some join by themselves, some were taken. Approximately 56 boys were taken, some are still there, some lost their life. That was in 1986 when the SPLA came for the first time.

It is difficult for many people to be strong when talking about their losses. Most have lost family members in the war – some might have suffered the loss of just one son, others have lost all members of their nuclear family. One woman interviewed witnessed how her husband and seven children were killed in one attack by the LRA in the Aru-Kubi area in 1998. Another widow in Magwi, whose father and two brothers were killed by the LRA, had to interrupt the interview because she said it was too painful for her to continue talking about her loss.

In areas with continuous attacks over several months – such as Ikotos County or Aru – family members often did not get a chance to bury their dead. In some cases, people could not return to their village until most dead bodies had already decomposed. When Imatong residents returned two years after the initial attacks that drove them away, they buried the dead who had by that time mostly become unrecognizable. Many respondents mentioned they did not have time to mourn their dead and did not have graves they could visit and honour.

# The current situation

"Peace is not like we expected. I cannot say there is peace – there is no infrastructure to make the community feel comfortable. Nothing is growing." *Aru-Kubi resident*

## 5.1 Ongoing conflicts

The current situation is marked by insecurity and uncertainty, mistrust and community conflicts. Years of war and changing alliances of communities or individuals have created a sphere of fear, which often leads to actions of revenge within and between communities. Residents reported that revenge has been taken on those suspected of having committed atrocities against their own communities, either individually or as part of an armed group, often the LRA.

Insecurity – whether real or perceived – is the greatest inhibitor to change in the border area. One man summed up multiple problems by saying that "we used to have enough food, but people have abandoned fertile areas because of insecurity."

The border area is unsafe because of armed groups and armed civilians, as well as uncleared landmines and unexploded ordnances (UXO). UXOs are visible in Magwi and Palotaka and local people report landmines in Kit, Magwi, Parajok, Jebel Lin, Acwar, Aru Junction, Ikotos County and Lokiliri payam.

During war times, residents were used to hearing SAF Antonov planes. The plane noise was associated with two things: bombing campaigns and LRA movement. As a supply plane for the LRA, Antonov planes used to cross in accordance with LRA movement, inside Sudan and towards Uganda. Supply planes for the LRA flew along the Parajok-Pageri line, say local people. In mid-June 2008, residents of Magwi and Ikotos County heard the first Antonovs since 2006 and 2004 respectively. It caused great concern. "Antonov implies air drops, so people are worried," one man said. Ugandan helicopter gunships – spotted regularly up to June 2008 – add to their uncertainty, said another man: "We are worried that the area is not yet secured. Like now, some Ugandan gunships move crossing and that is a sign of knowing the LRA is within."

Such insecurity causes great distrust, frustration and cynicism within the communities and between community and armed forces. The level of distrust is visible everyday and regularly erupts into violence. People in Magwi recounted how in April 2007 one man was shot in the bush by the SPLA because he was feared to be LRA. Around the same time, some civilians were arrested by SPLA as suspected LRA collaborators. It later turned out that the man shot had probably run from the SPLA because he had

mistaken them for LRA – just as they had mistaken him for LRA.

The continuing – although recently much more debated – UPDF presence remains puzzling for many border residents. They have seen little evidence that the UPDF acts as a protection force and report numerous incidents in which UPDF soldiers caused harm. In their eyes, some soldiers have a long history of abusing the privilege of being in Sudan.

"Why did Uganda come into Southern Sudan and kill us?" asked one respondent. "There is peace now – why are Uganda's soldiers still staying with us now? They may also kill us when they find us in the bush." While such sentiments are the most common, a few expressed gratefulness about the UPDF's presence: "I thank Museveni for having sent his soldiers to Sudan, they have assisted a lot in controlling the LRA," said one man in Ikotos County.

The distrust of rogue UPDF soldiers also translates into distrust of the Ugandan government – and with that, distrust of neighbours across the borders. Residents along the border see a deliberate attempt of the Ugandan government to keep Sudan unstable as a diversionary tactic from what is going on in Uganda. "They are people who want these counties to suffer by giving chaos to the people," one woman explained. Another reason for the UPDF's interest in staying in Sudan which residents often mention is the ability to encroach on the border (*see section Disputed border on page 33*). Several respondents mentioned members of the UPDF had engaged in taking Sudan's resources.

One man in Ikotos said that the "UPDF looted and raped here, mainly in Katire. People in the mountains were very hostile to UPDF." In Magwi County, one woman explained, "sometimes when the UPDF did not have anything to eat, they turn and pretend to be the LRA and ambush you." Residents of Aru Junction report that in the past the UPDF laid road ambushes on the Juba-Nimule road, stealing money and bicycles from civilians. A civilian described a typical ambush involving UPDF soldiers as, "they stop you on the road, they say to you 'I am LRA, these are the politics of Omar Bashir [the President of Sudan and head of the Khartoum government].'" And then they capture you, they take everything." One man recalls a killing by some UPDF soldiers in Agoro in February 2008.



Young and armed cattle keepers on the Sudan-Uganda border.

Other residents also accused some UPDF of taking "many Sudanese girls and boys. They took them and still these people did not return. One time, UPDF killed one soldier of the SPLA who was supposed to identify places where the LRA are. This was because they do not like to fight with their brothers." Another man reported that some Ugandan soldiers burnt down his crops "and said they need to do it so that the LRA should not survive on the fields." Several interviewees described the LRA and UPDF as being 'like twins'. One person elaborated and said, "when [the] community reported that LRA has crossed, UPDF said we are twins, like Opio Ocen. Ocen is the brother in the bush, how can I stab my brother? Do you want our mother to cry?"

People in border areas are wary of information about movements because they feel they are often deliberately misled. Their experience is that sometimes LRA movements announced in the press or through some Sudan-based UPDF commanders leads to increased looting and harassment by some UPDF soldiers. In the past they have received reports about LRA movement, followed by movement of UPDF trucks. The residents failed to see LRA anywhere but ambushes and looting took place near the UPDF trucks, local authorities said. "Most of the witnesses can recognize UPDF because some of them have seen

them before when a truck moves," one local leader said. "When a truck moved to a point where there was no LRA and then something happens, people are suspicious."

When in early June the Ugandan tabloid *The Red Pepper* reported that the LRA had crossed into Panyikwara, residents were sceptical. Despite the fact that the *Red Pepper* article was used by local authorities to prove the LRA had moved, residents of Panyikwara in June were certain no LRA had been there recently. They had a clear explanation why such movement might have been reported. "We think UPDF will attack in Panyikwara and say it is LRA," one interviewee said. Several also pointed out locals "get employed by UPDF" to stage ambushes and looting. Many lament the fact that rogue UPDF used to just move in their area without informing the community leaders or the SPLA about their troop movement.

## 5.2 The peace process with the LRA

Residents have experienced that the peace process between the LRA and Ugandan government and the workshops and conferences or community assessments it brought have led to few tangible results, either in improved security or basic services. The community feels helpless and disenfranchised on issues of their own security. Having

been chosen as the assembly area for the LRA in summer 2006, the community of Magwi County and specifically people living near the assembly site in Owiny-Kibul felt overwhelmed and not consulted.

In addition, the proposed assembly of the LRA brought promises by organizations to deliver services and resources that would benefit the general population. This stirred up strong emotions in local residents who hoped their area would receive some attention and development activities. In the early days of the peace process, communication between local residents and the LRA or its representatives improved greatly but has now broken down. Most of the projects – such as a school near the assembly area – were however abandoned as soon as it became clear the LRA was not going to assemble in Owiny-Kibul.

Broken promises by organizations have made people cynical and the failure of the LRA assembly did little to instil hope and trust in either the Southern Sudan government or the peace process. People expressed a desire to have someone to communicate with – either directly from the LRA or its delegates or members of the LRA diaspora. While the delegates have focused exclusively on the peace deal and consulting residents inside Uganda, there is a real desire in Sudan to become engaged in dialogue and consultations.

The experience of Owiny-Kibul has left Eastern Equatorians feeling even more disenfranchised. Residents of Owiny-Kibul felt an assembly in any case should only have been allowed with simultaneous disarmament in order to protect them. "You allow the LRA to come to the peace process with weapons to Sudan to make peace in Uganda. Is there logic in this peace process?" asked one man.

In the muddled security environment of 2006-07, residents report that a group of Dinka pretended to be LRA and looted their provisions but were later identified. Similarly, members of a militia aligned with Khartoum pretended to harass and loot people in the guise of SPLA soldiers from November 2006 to January 2007, but were found out because "they do things differently." NGOs and local people report that civilians suffer abuse from armed forces – in April, an army officer was shot in the SPLA headquarters in New Site, supposedly over a land dispute that involved a high-ranking army official.

During the war years, residents saw the LRA as part of the bigger war – as an armed group that was a destructive force but in the context of much violence and fighting. The view has changed somewhat since the signing of the CPA. They now express a keen view of the LRA as being

a deliberate impediment to Sudanese peace. Most are convinced the LRA still receives support from Khartoum to act as a destabilizing agent in the CPA implementation. Yet they also blame Uganda's government for exporting its own war to Sudan and making development in southern Sudan difficult.

Hence, development and security are universally seen as the biggest challenges; concerns about dealing with atrocities of the past are taking a backseat to issues of everyday survival in difficult conditions. In people's minds, development is closely connected to peace – in fact both peace and reconciliation ceremonies are equated with development. There is a strong sense that "our communities gave a lot during the war", as one respondent said, but have not yet been given anything back. Good roads, for example, imply a secure environment and hence signal peace to the residents. Being able to cultivate vegetables and send children to a proper school and access health care and clean water are all definite signs of peace and vital to achieving community reconciliation. Despite experiencing a much more peaceful environment since the LRA left, people in the visited counties remain extremely vulnerable.

### **5.3 Land disputes**

Other current conflicts have their beginning in old feuds, some based on shifting alliances during war years. Others are fuelled by ongoing disagreements, often about resources and most notably about land.

The neighbouring Acholi and Madi have been embroiled in long-running feuds caused by different alliances during war times, mutual blame for atrocities as well as disputes over land use. The Madi live along the so-called Madi corridor along the road leading towards Nimule. Acholi land roughly begins slightly east of the Madi corridor along the road to Magwi. Yet several plots of land in Madi corridor have been disputed for a long time. For example both Acholi and Madi claim the area of Opari for themselves. Violence has frequently occurred in this area. During the census conducted in spring 2008, Madi and Acholi argued about where they would be counted in order to claim that land as tribal land. One Acholi interviewee summed it up by saying that currently there is "not total hatred, but leaders from that [Madi] land do not want Acholi there." Any movement in the disputed areas, any signs of settlement or cultivation keep the conflict alive because the land has not been demarcated to everyone's satisfaction.

Closer to Juba, tensions are still ongoing between Acholi and Bari, who say that Acholi have taken some of their

land along the River Kit. The River Kit divided Lolubo from Acholi land and in the eyes of the Lolubo, both Bari and Acholi settled on Lolubo land. The chief of Lokiliri boma pointed out that his people have no problem with the Lokoya – as is the case with the Lolubo of Lyria. But there is still a need to solve the border dispute between Bari, Acholi and Lolubo at the River Kit because in the current, unresolved state each tension is answered with violence by the youth: "The government should be warned that conflict should happen in this place," he said.

#### **5.4 Broken communities**

*"In a war situation, anybody is like a chameleon."*  
Government official in Magwi County

Communities in the border- and LRA-affected areas have many wounds to heal. They have been caught in the middle of a vicious war with many actors. Most have been displaced – many for years and to foreign countries. What could be considered 'markers' for peace have not yet materialized to prove peace has come. People who have lived with the presence of various armed groups and shifting alliances within their communities are suspicious of each other.

In many areas, community leadership is uncertain. The paramount chief of the Tseretenya area, for example, was killed in 2002 but so far the elders have not replaced him. In many villages, chiefs struggle to maintain their leadership because they lost authority during the war years when power was in the hands of those with guns – or because they themselves struggle to get back on their feet.

One issue brought up in many communities was the difficult and often ambiguous relationship local communities had with the LRA. Residents allied with the LRA for various reasons. Protection is an obvious one – providing the LRA with food and possible shelter was the only way to prevent an attack. Yet loyalties at times went further than that. In a desolate environment with no hope, the strength of the LRA could be appealing to disenfranchised individuals. Others engaged in trading with the LRA established stronger links. One chief reports there were intermarriages between the LRA and civilians.

It is a difficult issue to discuss openly in most communities. One chief responded: "I cannot say these people of Lokoya tribe, they have not joined the LRA." Others explain it was displacement that caused an even greater need for protection, which was then sought from the LRA: "People were scattered, so they might have joined LRA where they were displaced." Others use the term 'joined' loosely to

describe both abduction and other less obviously forced ways of participating in the LRA. But in general, there is often recognition that relations between LRA and local people were complex: "Of course human beings do relate, you cannot assume that [the LRA] was Ugandans alone, it was Sudanese also," said one person interviewed.

In Magwi County, it is noticeable that people suspect each other of having collaborated with the LRA. In early 2007 such distrust led to a volatile situation in Parajok. The LRA came to see the *payam* administrator to ask with help for food – during that time, the LRA had refused to accept the food provided by the government of Southern Sudan at Owiny-Kibul as part of peace negotiations but was apparently also under instruction to not loot. The LRA told the *payam* administrator that they wanted to ask the community for food, so the administrator went and gathered food items from the community. Simultaneously, the LRA proceeded to loot cassava and sesame crops, making the community believe the administrator had collaborated with the LRA. The youth became violent towards the administrator, also blaming a recent death of a boy on the collaboration between the administrator and the LRA. Various people were arrested on suspicions of collaboration: the administrator, a group of people suspected to have supplied food and other items to the LRA, plus another group who supposedly had been seen looting at night pretending to be LRA. All were later released but trust and community cohesion have so far not been restored.

The LRA, others said, also partnered with local defence forces: "they are like brothers they can give them food." The local defence forces were civilian militias often initiated by a local leader to provide some protection to his people because no protection was expected from the army. Their protection role was often compromised by armed groups who used them to their advantage, notably, as locals said, the UPDF. One man explained, "local defence forces, some of them pretend to be LRA. They work with the recognition of the UPDF. They just loot people's money and luggage because they also benefit out of it."

Such experiences have created distrust. Rebuilding a sense of community is extremely challenging in an environment that offers little to help development. The reality of everyday life in many communities along the border is that most time is spent drinking. During the research we often reached villages in the middle of the day to find many residents – men, women, leaders – drunk. Some communities, unable to grow enough food because of lack of seeds, have flourishing marijuana plantations. The effect on men and women of all ages and on development, cultivation and community



SPLA soldiers en route to their detachment in Owiny-Kibul, Magwi County, 2008.

cohesion is devastating. The most popular cross-border trade good is alcohol. People from Ikotos County reportedly walk for almost two days each month to get to Agoro in Uganda for an alcohol auction.

One chief in Lokiliri payam explained. "Why are people drinking so much? The reason is people are idle. Most are youth who grew up during war without the law to guide them. So they live without guidance, they drink everyday. Without beer they don't want to dig, when they drink, they go to dig and they fight." He said that unless he paid with alcohol, his people would not work in communal farming or attempt community projects, such as road clearing or building a school. If he failed to provide alcohol, they would start attacking him. "They are so violent," he said. He saw the reason in the role the youth took on during the war. The youth, he explained, stayed behind in the village during the war and protected the community. Without the youth, nobody would be alive. But now they are not ready to change their violent behaviour. "When I ask them to stay calm, they say 'the peace has come, why should you tell us what to do?'"

Community and political leaders see alcohol dependence as both a symptom and a cause of broken communities.

Many interviewees described their own communities as broken for various reasons. Having been under permanent attack is only the most obvious one.

Women have been particularly vulnerable. One woman who stayed in Sudan and only fled to the mountains when the LRA or other groups attacked said: "Women suffered more because they moved with their children, so more were wounded and killed." Another woman in Magwi explained that many women were raped by soldiers of the various armies and armed groups and to this day "some women cannot even bear to look at men's faces." In explaining which soldiers abused women, little distinction is made between the various armies. "Any soldier when put in the bush, they start to rape women." In some communities, leaders have commented that women did not used to participate in drinking but made an income from brewing alcohol. This has changed in many areas, where women are now consuming as much alcohol as the men.

Equatorians who stayed in SAF-garrison towns now find themselves caught between two conflicts. Tension between Equatorians and the SPLA has been apparent since the early days of the war and many Equatorians feel ethnic hatred was spurred on by the late SPLA leader

John Garang – and in return, they express ethnic divisions towards Dinka. "John Garang has inflicted bad things on us," said one Acholi woman who lived in Juba during the war. "Even people in garrison towns contributed [to the SPLA struggle]. We sent out information to the SPLA and went to prison for it. There are now still Equatorians fighting in Abyei. But even during the war, they [the Dinka] did not abuse Equatorian people as much as they do now."

Other community leaders said decades of uncertainty have destroyed community cultivation and interaction patterns. "Now it's only individual cultivation," said one leader. "People no longer do communal work." Other leaders said "relief food has made people idle." Communal work on fields used to be a protection mechanism for weaker community members, often those affected by war: widows, children who became heads of household or disabled people. Abandonment of community traditions has become more pronounced with the return of refugees who in many cases spent almost two decades in refugee camps in different cultural settings. One man put it succinctly when he said "returnees from Uganda, Kenya or other exile all dig their own fields."

Conflicts between returnees and those who stayed also erupt over other issues. The permanently displaced often return to find their original land taken. In many cases, the new occupants might have been in that spot for many years and will not accept leaving their homes for returnees – who in their eyes were given many more opportunities for education whilst in camps in Uganda or Kenya. It is noted that some returnees can afford to keep their children in school in Uganda. For community leaders, the lack of educational opportunities in Sudan means long-term recovery has not yet started. With educated people staying away for better jobs or continuing education, it is difficult to fill local administration positions or to develop local strategies for development. There is a keen awareness among those who stayed in Sudan that this is now a disadvantage as they did not benefit from education funded by UNHCR in Uganda or Kenya (*see section Returning to Sudan on page 22 for more detail*).

Different accusations are voiced against those who come back from Uganda, most notably that they have learned how to poison people. During this research, respondents did not allude to returnees from Uganda as being tainted because they have killed people (which is a common theme in Uganda) or as being HIV positive – although one man said that his wife had been raped by an LRA soldier during an attack and subsequently died of AIDS-related illnesses.

When asked to develop a vision of what his community should look like in five years time, one leader in Ikotos County said:

We should have road maintenance and employment for people. Kony will come down and we have peace. We can sell timber from Katire, the Imatong tea project in Upper Talanga is revived and there is communication between Uganda and Sudan. We can grow cabbages and potatoes to trade in Uganda and maybe we can use mountain water to make our own bottled water.

In reality, he added that his community does not share such a vision because it is difficult for them to see any future for themselves. As a result, many community leaders interviewed said their communities were no longer prepared to work to invest in their vision. Instead of rebuilding their houses, which had often been destroyed several times, and cultivating their fields if they have seeds, they prefer to sit and wait until the situation changes. Sitting and waiting often includes drinking everyday, causing a vicious cycle in which nothing happens.

Some interviewees said relief food had taken away the community's vision for building their own future as it meant that returnees continued to live as refugees in their own homes. "We are not to be given food, we are to live as citizens," one man said, pointing out "farm tools have to be provided to improve the standard of farming." Several people said the lack of cultivation was devastating because it meant people were not trusting their future and because "fertile empty land lays barren."

Other leaders also said it had become increasingly difficult for them to mobilize the community because they expect to be paid to attend community meetings. "It is hard to sensitize Magwi community, they don't want to be called without getting anything, explained one woman working in community sensitization. "If you don't bring water and soda, they will not talk to you. After each meeting, they will demand something from you."

A sentiment often repeated by both leaders and local people was that they would like to develop a sense that they can do something about their community. However they see too many problems with insecurity and threats from across the border to see much sense in working only to have their work destroyed, to gather for peace meetings only to experience further fighting and to be questioned about their war experience and their needs only to have hopes and expectations disappointed.

# Community healing and reconciliation

6

"Reconciliation takes time, it means asking for forgiveness several times." *Imatong resident*

It is difficult to define how the various communities and individuals interpret the meaning of 'reconciliation', as the term is used quite loosely. While some people used it to describe the need for improved relations between people in the most general sense, most respondents gave it a more specific meaning. In general, the word 'reconciliation' is most commonly used to describe an ultimate goal, an end to a process, rather than a process itself. Most respondents suggested that 'reconciliation' marked a moment in which two parties openly showed they had come to terms with their conflicts. Quite commonly, 'reconciliation' becomes interchangeable with 'reconciliation ceremony', which is an event to mark the end of hostilities and peaceful coexistence of conflict parties. Ceremonies can thus only play a part in a reconciliatory process leading to forgiveness, possibly compensation and peaceful coexistence, rather than acting as the moment of reconciliation.

The process that leads to reconciliation cannot be started in the current climate, some respondents explained. Most people named two conditions as necessary to, as one woman called it, "create the mood for reconciliation: security and disarmament." Consequently, one man summed up that any "reconciliation before finishing peace talks will only be destroyed." Other wishes expressed as part of the process that can ultimately lead to reconciliation are the urgent need to identify and mourn killed family members, identify the most vulnerable members of the community and facilitate inter-communal communication to achieve peace and reconciliation.

## 6.1 Ceremonies

Traditional justice and reconciliation ceremonies, including those for welcoming back family members, have become one of the most discussed topics in northern Uganda. Peace negotiations between the LRA and the Ugandan government focused on the suitability of local justice procedures for accountability and community healing. While the agreement on accountability, signed by the LRA and the Ugandan government puts an emphasis on local procedures to account for crimes by lower-ranking fighters, their suitability remains contested. It has become clear that to establish the procedures as meaningful accountability alternatives in the eyes of the victims, they might have to be adjusted from an often-simplified belief in the usefulness of tradition. Also, some affected people refuse to take part in the traditional ceremonies as they interfere with their religious beliefs.

In Sudan, most communities have ceremonies for peacemaking and reconciliation, although in some communities visited for this research they are seldomly

performed. In communities with histories of displacement, traditions have lost their meaning, expressed by one man who said, "we have a special word for reconciliation gathering, but I have forgotten the language."

A certain fatigue about reconciliation ceremonies is noticeable along with a loss of trust that ceremonies and peace meetings can bring the necessary change. In Imatong, where people still suffer from cattle-raiding, it is recalled with bitterness that in January 2008 the Lango residents performed a peace and reconciliation ceremony with the Latuko, who used to come and raid their cattle. Shortly after the ceremony was performed, the Latuko came back to raid cattle and killed 14 people. The belief that a solution can be found through a ceremony has now been largely lost in the community.

While some people expressed doubt that any reconciliation ceremonies could be useful in their own context, others saw possibilities of adjusting ceremonies to accommodate cross-border communal and even state reconciliation. "If people were killed by LRA," one man said, "the first target is to go to interact with the Ugandan government and then bit by bit we work on international reconciliation to find out how it can happen between countries."

"Reconciliation with Uganda is very difficult because they change like chameleons," said one man, expressing his distrust. He felt the Ugandan government was responsible for the death of John Garang and that continued Ugandan military presence in Sudan was a concerted effort to intimidate and weaken Sudan: "Our great leader died and he got his death from Uganda. And now they are continuing killing us, reducing our population."

Most interviewees said that while their own communities could handle reconciliation and accountability for crimes among community members, they saw a need for both governments to get involved in reconciling with the LRA to acknowledge the unique problem of accounting for LRA crimes. "Let the government bring us together to let us know who are LRA and how to bring peace among ourselves. The LRA need to be brought back before us and make peace with cleansing. Each one should bring a goat to be eaten in one place," said one man.

Most people believe the responsibility for initiating ceremonies with the local Sudanese communities rests with the Ugandan government: "They need to make peace in their land first, then we can also make peace. The peace then can be made together with cleansing bulls. All parties have to bring bulls, the LRA and we people affected by LRA."



*Debates in Sudan about using Acholi Mato Oput ceremonies (above) for community reconciliation echo those in Uganda.*

### 6.1.1 Acholi

In Uganda, the accountability discussion has largely focused on the ceremony of *Mato Oput*. In the Sudanese Acholi community, debates about the applicability of *Mato Oput* for community reconciliation echo the ongoing debates in Uganda. The traditional *Mato Oput* is understood to be a ceremony between individuals or families, involving admittance of a homicide committed and payment of compensation. Sudanese Acholi in Panyikwara pointed out how closely the performance of any reconciliation ceremony is linked to establishing peace first because the:

LRA did not come as individuals, so how do we make *Mato Oput*? In *Mato Oput* with them, we don't make as individuals, but LRA as a whole. If they come out of the bush, that will give us the mandate to forgive. But we cannot do a group of LRA for *Mato Oput*, if another group of LRA is still in the bush.

Others pointed out the need for accountability procedures did not extend to northern Ugandans in general, saying that they saw the LRA as quite unconnected from northern Ugandan civilians, who often have shared the same

experience of atrocities as the Sudanese. Residents in Magwi said it is important to understand that *Mato Oputis* not reconciliation, but merely one step in the process of reconciliation, in the move towards *Roco Wat*, which is the stage at which communities and people are reconciled.

### 6.1.2 Lango

*Nakali* is a reconciliation ceremony performed in the Lango area. It brings together two parties with a dispute – usually over the killing of a person. Each party brings a white goat. The goats are stood next to each other with their heads facing and are then slaughtered and cut in half, with the head of one goat and the body of the other goat being quickly taken away to be roasted. The family of the perpetrator is then asked: "Did you kill our man?" to which they have to answer "yes." The questioning continues, with the family of the victim asking, "are you ready to reconcile, are you ready to pay and will you not repeat?" If all questions are answered with a yes, those attending the ceremony hold up grass to symbolize spears and the ceremony is concluded with dancing and eating of the goats – and the agreed compensation is paid, usually goats or cattle.

In 2007 several *Nakali* ceremonies were held in Ikotos County to reconcile families. Another ceremony performed and considered as useful for the current situation is *Namumuha*, a cleansing ceremony performed by the elders to eliminate hatred through blessings.

#### **6.1.3 Lokoya**

In the ceremony called *Emora*, the Lokoya come together to, as one leader described it, "let us forget our fighting of the past, let us come together without any animosity, let us forget all those things." The idea is to "reconcile by togetherness" by sitting together, slaughtering a goat or cow and by consulting the community on how to assist in this conflict.

Lokoya elders said this would be difficult to do with the LRA since part of the ceremony has to be the payment of compensation – in the past paid with a girl, now paid with cattle or goats. One elder explained what happened after payment of compensation:

Then followed the reconciliation ceremony. Now in the case of LRA and Uganda, all the destruction and the lives lost are caused by LRA. So the Ugandan government should compensate us with development as reconciliation process. This can be done when LRA and Ugandan government sign a peace deal.

#### **6.1.4 Lolubo**

A reconciliation ceremony involving the communal slaughtering of a goat is called *Ajuri Benidue*. A cleansing ceremony is performed through sprinkling of water on a perpetrator and the slaughtering of a black goat. The ceremony, called *Eyinuui* ("to sprinkle water") involves putting goat's dung on the forehead and chest of both families involved so they can "go home in peace." This ceremony is performed only after the elders have sat down and the perpetrator has apologized in their presence.

Lolubo returnees in Aru-Kubi said it had been a long time since they had performed *Eyinuui*:

We are still waiting for all refugees to come back to do one big *Eyinuui* for all the things that happened. Small *Eyinuuis* in the family are happening. With the LRA, no *Eyinuui* is possible because we are apart from them. Abducted Sudanese LRA can do *Eyinuui* in their community, but not Ugandan LRA.

### **6.2 Reconciling with the LRA**

When people talk about reconciling with the LRA, they most commonly refer to a general process of reconciliation with LRA members and Ugandans who were in the LRA. Reconciling with Sudanese who were with the LRA tends to be kept quite separate and is seen as a much more individualized process. Attitudes to reconciliation with the LRA – that is, the organization as part of a peace process and Ugandan individuals – vary widely and seem unconnected to personal losses suffered. One woman when asked what she thinks should happen with the LRA explained;

The LRA killed my husband and I am now suffering and nobody is helping me. This is caused by LRA. Only God can judge the LRA who kill my husband. I have no power. But since the LRA killed so many people, I have now no bad feeling for myself. I have forgiven the LRA.

Another man said he was not interested in engaging in any form with the LRA. For him, the best solution was to separate the pursuit of peace in Sudan and Uganda:

They should go back to Uganda to make peace. I am not ready to forgive the LRA because the LRA has killed my dear brother. Because of the LRA, the SPLA in Obbo now calls the people in Obbo LRA. Now the Acholi community in Sudan is being victimized because of LRA activities in our land. But I have no problem with other communities in northern Uganda.

One woman said, "I am not ready to reconcile with LRA. My heart is still burning for the dear one. I am not happy for the death of my daughter." Another woman in Magwi County said she was not interested in even thinking about the LRA. "For me, things should not be spoken about or should not be mentioned because the LRA are wrong people."

The community is not ready to forgive, said one man, quoting the prevalence of what he called the "spirit of Achol-Pii". He described the 'spirit of Achol-Pii' as the "spirit of killing" which causes community members to be interested in revenge rather than conciliatory gestures. "We still think," he said, "that one day we can kill those people because they killed us."

Those who wanted peaceful solutions for all communities along both sides of the border were unequivocal that it was "too early" to speak about reconciliation. A common sentiment was that the current situation first must be resolved, and relative peace and security experienced by

the community before any attempt at reconciliation can be made. While some said the LRA has had its chance to sign a peace deal and should now be fought militarily, others said they would like to see a negotiated solution if both sides are sincere: "Coming to the table is very important, if there is no peace there will be no reconciliation and vice versa." At the same time there is a clear understanding that peace and reconciliation are not linear processes but need each other, yet the exact order of events is impossible to determine.

Some interviewees outlined steps they see as necessary before reconciliation can be achieved. A credible peace deal with the LRA, signed by the Ugandan government and supported by the Southern Sudan government is vital. But some respondents also said they would want to see the LRA "come for repentance before reconciliation in the country" and the Ugandan government to apologize for inflicting its own war on the people of Sudan. This is seen as necessary to improve trust in the Ugandan government.

It is clear most people along the border recognize all parties need to be involved in the peace and reconciliation effort: the Ugandan government, the LRA and the Southern Sudan government as well as international organizations, referred to by one man as "the foreigners": "The foreigners might also solve the wounds of our hearts if Uganda and Southern Sudan government agree together. Foreigners are to stand for cleansing the two people, Uganda and Sudan." The expectation is 'foreigners' will facilitate the continued dialogue considered necessary to change sentiments, such as regular visits of high-level officials to affected areas. One woman said, "Ugandan leaders need to come and show that they are the same people as us."

### 6.3 Internal reconciliation

Numerous respondents pointed out that while it was necessary to come together with the Ugandans, they also had to find ways of dealing with rifts between and within Sudanese communities. Generally, these rifts are caused by different military loyalties in the same community. Peace and reconciliation with the LRA does not necessarily only mean reconciliation with Ugandans. A leader in one village said, "we need internal reconciliation because most people from here, they joined LRA."

It is difficult for individuals to deal with the fact that members of their own family or community fought in the LRA. But there is also a strong sense of the need to bring people back to the community to help establish a more peaceful environment. So while communities are often torn or unsure about how to deal with those who were in the

LRA, getting them back home is considered a priority. One man explained that:

Even during an attack of the LRA some of our people were demanding that Kony should release captured people from Sudanese Acholi or Madi. We want those people. We want reconciliation with them; we have forgiven because sometimes they were taken by force.

Other ongoing inter-communal issues involve continuing tensions between Madi and Acholi, despite dialogue and reconciliation conferences between these two neighbours. One man pointed out "Madi also blamed Acholi for SPLA abuse way back."

More recent inter-communal tensions have flared up between the Murle (who have abducted several young children) and the Lolubo and Lokoya. The Murle are a quite isolated group known to abduct very young children to bring them up as members of their group. It is suspected they do this to help strengthen their numbers. The Lolubo and Lokoya expressed an urgent need for the "elders of Murle and Lyria to come together to resolve the issue of raiding children. In this village, it is very hard to bring peace because of raiders, we will never have peace as there are still cattle and children."

To solve inner communal tensions in the Acholi community, Acholi from Panyikwara and Agoro (Sudan) gathered in early 2008 to reconcile over some killings that happened in the community. Those who attended the conference said the women pleaded with men to stop killing and that prayer solved the problem.

### 6.4 Healing the wounds

*"We need to do something in memory of the lost ones."  
Magwi resident*

Communities and individuals along the border are hurting. Individuals mourn for family members killed or missing and communities mourn for lost opportunities due to destruction of their homes, fields and schools. Many civilian interviewees explained they felt they had nowhere to go with their grief. Residents of Imatong explain that for years they could not return to their village to bury those killed in the 2002 attacks and give them funeral rites. When they finally returned in 2005, many of the dead were no longer identifiable. Others say that the graves of the family members lost early in the war were destroyed later and there was no memorial for people killed in the big massacres.



*Dangers in Magwi School.*

One person suggested the rebuilding of the community should be done in honour of those who lost their lives. He explained it would be a good idea to show the community was improving while remembering those who were no longer with them. "We should start building a school in the name of the deceased so that the people can assign remembrance. We build a school and leave a sign post there [saying] that it is also a memorial."

To counter 'the spirit of Achol-Pii', residents have for years organized a memorial prayer on the anniversary of the first massacre. But they feel this is not enough and that it is time to "let us build a memorial also for Achol-Pii. There are memorial graves in Uganda, why not the same here?" asked one woman, pointing out "Uganda didn't pay for commemoration signs for Sudanese people killed by LRA." One local politician in Magwi elaborated that "the community already released the land to build a church and memorial site but now they need support to construct it."

Another interviewee said three things needed to happen to help the community heal. Firstly the community had to establish places to mourn the dead and they also had to see that the community was rebuilding. Most importantly,

they needed to see vegetables growing again in the fields. Many respondents expressed the need to focus their effort on cultivation because "if you are very busy all the time in the field, you will forget the war." Imatong village, devastated by LRA attacks in 2002, is now being rebuilt. When asked why people are returning even though the village remains extremely isolated, the chief replied: "We like our home. We can practice agriculture here."

Being able to cultivate and watch things grow is directly connected with an image of peace. Local people in Palotaka remember fruit trees growing and laden with fruit during peaceful times, others mourn the loss of parts of their teak forests which they say have been cut down by UPDF soldiers and have not regrown.

However in Ikotos County, well-functioning agricultural schemes also conjure up memories of marginalization. "We went to war over our agriculture," said one man. Successful schemes such as the tea plantation in Upper Talanga and a scheme to grow potatoes or the sawmill in Katire were under central government control, and people remember that all produce was routinely sent to Khartoum. Consequently, most schemes stopped in 1983 with the

outbreak of war. The dormant schemes have in the eyes of the community become symbolic for both a continued state of insecurity but also a potential they have never managed to put to use for their own communities. "We can grow tomatoes, onions, cabbages, eggplants and lentils," explained one man in Tseretenya. "Vegetables here grow very well. We have the potential but we need skills and manpower. Most vegetable schemes are not functioning and we need to revive those schemes."

In a memorandum from the Magwi County community, submitted to chief mediator Riek Machar as part of the LRA-Ugandan government peace talks in March 2008, local leaders very specifically list the infrastructure needs of Magwi community. These include roads, one county hospital, four health centres and ten dispensaries, plus specific agricultural support such as 16 tractors and 36 ox ploughs to revive agricultural schemes. Leaders also pointed out the need for capacity building programmes and for ongoing peacebuilding activities such as exchange visits "on rotational basis" to "create healing". Leaders see a clear connection between such continuous development activities and peacebuilding. Lack of development is considered a driver for further conflict.

In many communities visited, residents and leaders alike pointed out the communities had become weak due to war, displacement and alcohol. Yet in some villages, leaders have managed to mobilize communities and have established or re-established communal participation for projects that benefit all. In one village between Imatong and Ikotos, people have been waiting for the construction of the school but saw no hope of getting a school anytime soon. So the leaders agreed with the community that each woman was obliged to bring grass and each man had to bring poles to construct a school together, the chief explained:

Who does not bring it gets charged UGX 5000 or a rooster. Because if some people don't bring anything, these people teach the community to misbehave, so they must be punished. If somebody refuses to pay, the whole group will mobilize to arrest him and discipline him. After punishment he still needs to get poles and then join the group again. Nobody has ever rejected to do that after punishment. So far, ten people were punished for not bringing poles and that is why we are now improving.

## 6.5 Compensation

*"For the people killed, the government of Uganda cannot pay the price, but they can help in the reconstruction of the villages destroyed by LRA. This is one way of cooling*

*down our burning hearts for our dear ones." Palotaka resident*

Compensation is seen as an integral part of reconciliation in all the communities visited. "The lost ones should be paid back in one way or another. I want the LRA and Uganda to rebuild schools, health and preaching centres they destroyed to make cleansing and forgiveness meaningful," said one man.

How compensation is defined differs from one community to the next. Everybody interviewed agreed some sort of material acknowledgement had to be exchanged to appreciate the suffering of community and individuals. Residents have different opinions about who is responsible for paying compensation or what it should entail. Yet lack of compensation, they often stated, would show there was not yet peace and would mean the community still had to take revenge, meaning a return to fighting.

People have different views about who should benefit from compensation and how it should be paid. The most striking difference here was between people who had grown up in Ugandan refugee camps and – mostly older – community members who did not leave Sudan during the war. Those who grew up in Uganda are more comfortable with the idea of individual compensation – for example, having their school fees paid in return for having been abducted by the LRA. This seems to echo the approach of aid agencies working in Uganda in recent years, which often could do little to help communities living in camps but could support individuals. Interviewees who stayed in Sudan generally put a stronger emphasis on community compensation. In some cases, they found individual compensation outright inappropriate, especially to families who lost family members in attacks.

When asked why they felt individual compensation was inappropriate, several answers were given. "Acholi don't ask for payment because they believe that if you take money received through the blood of a person, you get leprosy," said one woman from Parajok. Others said receiving money for a person just made them feel like slaves since only slaves were exchanged for money. One person also pointed out that receiving money individually from the government in Sudan had the air of being bought because "the Khartoum government always offered money to people to buy their support." "Individual compensation makes life meaningless because our dear ones cannot come back," said one woman who had lost a daughter. Her sentiment was echoed by a man who said "my father was killed by the LRA, but [this] is to inform the government that I don't want ... to be paid, I want to be paid with a

school because our children should not become empty minds like their parents."

Others recognized individual compensation as unrealistic because they had seen in Uganda that it was not working. One person in Tsereteny suggested it was possible to pay the family of someone abducted or killed in his village because not so many people were killed, but "if more than 20 people in one community are killed, they may need something for the development of that area. But here, payment can be given to families, that is 22 cows or five million Ugandan Shilling for one person killed." Another person from Imatong said that for his community, because of the large number of people killed "for 300 lives to be compensated, they can have a project to help the community with food. And with that food they could also hold proper funeral rites for 300 people to praise them because they were killed innocently."

Affected communities along the border expect compensation to be paid by the Ugandan government as part of a regional peace process. Residents of Katire, for example, have put together a list of their demands, as one man explained:

Katire today has no people because 600 of them were killed in 2002. The place where LRA did destruction, the government of Uganda should rebuild. The lost ones have to be compensated with money. The Ugandan government must compensate us by building schools, health and bridges.

Another person said everything that was to be paid in compensation needed to contribute to good relations with Uganda: "If peace is there, we want Sudan and Uganda to cooperate by bringing some networks like communication network and road network. These networks will bring peace." The majority of interviewees see it as a responsibility of the Southern Sudan government to put forth local demands for compensation to the Ugandan government and distribute the compensation: "It will not be given to individuals but to the Southern Sudan government, so that the government will implement it with the community." They also expect their own government to facilitate better exchanges between the two neighbouring governments and local authorities.

Various past experiences have shown people how compensation and reconciliation among communities can work – some of them even involving cross-border compensation. One example given of good and fruitful cross-border interaction is an incident in 2004 when

elephants from Uganda ventured into Sudan and destroyed crops in Birr. When Uganda offered to send relief foods to affected people, the Sudanese in return agreed to not kill the elephants, thereby "both people and animals were saved and that was a very nice interaction."

Another good example of how a conflict was resolved was relayed by a man in Obbo who explained that after some fighting between the people of Agoro (Sudan) and Magwi, the Acholi of Magwi agreed to hand over some land to Agoro. The land was named Ollolweny, which roughly translates as 'better than war' and the conflict has never resurfaced.

Several interviewees suggested Uganda could also compensate with land – and one way to do that would be to properly demarcate the border. Residents of Obbo and Palotaka tell the story of a fight between Obbo and Lokung, in which Lokung defeated Obbo. Obbo then asked the residents of Parajok to come to their aid in fighting Lokung. With the help of Parajok, Obbo defeated Lokung, but many lives from Parajok were lost. Obbo compensated Parajok with land as a means of reconciliation and "this has made the two communities live in peace because up to now this land has helped all generations of Parajok. This is the best way of reconciliation and *Mato Oput* followed. If the Ugandan government wants us to reconcile and be good neighbours, they should compensate the lives and properties lost in terms of development, like building schools and road. The LRA and Uganda should find solutions like this for this war in northern Uganda."

Others spoke of less encouraging experiences with compensation. One man in Parajok said his son was killed by a UPDF officer and "I was promised to be compensated for my son by a UPDF commander but the UPDF did not come back up to now." In Katire *payam*, an attempt at reconciliation through compensation was stifled by local conflict. The widows of 75 men killed by the LRA were given ox ploughs by the church as a gesture of compensation and to make it easier for them to cultivate. The ox ploughs became useless when all the cattle were raided.

# Coming home

7

"We know [the returnees] might come with a different mentality. But since we come together as brothers and sisters, we know we shall solve our difference to make us live in peace." *Panyikwara resident*



UNHCR trucks on the Magwi-Torit road.

## 7.1 Returning from the LRA

In northern Uganda, the issues surrounding reintegration of former LRA combatants into their communities have been struggled with for years. Escaping the LRA inside Sudan and returning home as a Sudanese has however posed very different challenges because structures to deal with LRA returnees – such as reception centres – are not as established.

Sudanese LRA returnees who return within Sudan and do not go via Uganda have received very little assistance or attention. Similarly, local communities have little experience in creating structures for reintegration and generally lack precise ideas as to what reintegration could entail. For most people, reintegration equals return and is successful if there are no further problems with the LRA returnee. Yet

many Sudanese returnees do not become fully recognized community members and live in a village hidden away by their relatives. In one reported case, a female Ugandan LRA returnee was forced to stay in Sudan by a Sudanese man and live as his wife, reportedly as compensation for family members killed. Residents of the village are unaware of her past but local officials suspect the community would take revenge on her if they did.

Sudanese individuals abducted from Sudan and returned directly to Sudan seem to be welcomed back most easily. The community seems to extend its bewilderment about being caught up in Uganda's war by not blaming a Sudanese individual for having been abducted by and staying with the LRA. Sudanese who were abducted in Uganda and returned to Uganda report more discrimination or harassment.

There is a striking difference in talking about the LRA experience and reintegration between Sudanese who have spent a lot of time in Uganda and those who did not. Those who spent time in Uganda tend to talk much more about their personal experience. They outline the challenges connected to returning and reintegrating, such as coping with name-calling. Lack of individual support for school fees and training is a common theme.

One young man who had been with the LRA for about two years from 1997 to 1999 described his experience of coming back to his Sudanese community: "I am sad to be isolated, but those who call me names don't even react to me. I cannot manage to [raise] any means to reconcile me with the community." His mother – who was abducted from Achol-Pii together with her son but released the same day – reiterated, "measures need to be taken with the community, the community is hostile especially in terms of language and some assistance for former LRA is needed, like training for driving or joinery."

Sudanese who spent time with the LRA but did not live in Uganda speak of their return and needs in a different way. They state needs that are much more community-oriented, rather than focused on their individual well-being (*see section on Compensation, page 25*).

Sudanese LRA returnees who did not spend much time in Ugandan camps were less likely to be surrounded by peers who have been through the same experience. This can have two effects, respondents said. They might feel more isolated, but less attention can also aid reintegration. Local authorities or local church leaders explained they were making a conscious effort to divert community attention from the returnees but acknowledged that "community sensitization needs to be done" as part of healing communities.

For community leaders in Sudan, the challenge of preparing for the return of Sudanese LRA members is great. They are aware that few provisions have been made to handle returnees in any systematic way, unlike in Uganda where a system is in place, even if it does not always function smoothly. In Sudan, Juba-based NGO Totto Chan is the only local organization dealing specifically with LRA returnees, usually in partnership with UNICEF. One leader in Ikotos County expressed concern about being less than prepared for the return of large numbers of Sudanese from the LRA:

Our problem will be where will they appear? If they appear in Uganda, those people in Uganda were trained to deal with it. If they appear on Juba road,

Totto Chan is there. If they appear here, we have some people who are trained in counselling. But we would need the same equipment as other centres, like a hall to sleep safely, toys to play, well fenced so they stay inside.

Leaders and community stress their readiness to welcome LRA returnees, but the process of returning and acceptance is complex and lengthy. In some areas like Owiny-Kibul and Panyikwara, the community very openly knows who was with the LRA, whereas in other communities this is kept secret. A local leader described the return of a woman from the LRA:

Only leaders in [the] county know she was with LRA, not the people. If people know, they create problems for her. She can't work in the village because of her wounds, she cannot carry because of [having carried] heavy loads. The community does not see her as an enemy but others will come and use abusive language. All people are not kind and it will create an issue. People will say 'you are just like LRA'.

The reports on how LRA returnees are treated are diverse and reflect an often contradictory, uneasy but also changing relationship with a difficult situation. One community leader in Ikotos County expressed the community sentiment that they need help dealing with returnees: "People feel their children who are with the LRA are already dead. Those children who are there, they are no longer children. They are already rebels. They can only come back if they change through counselling." In the same community, a religious leader stated, "we always receive our children back when they come from LRA." However, social workers from Totto Chan report that LRA returnees are "not cared for in their families when they return, there are no provisions, but it is not enough that a child simply comes back home." Other returnees say they were treated well but also say there are few resources available to them. This does not necessarily seem targeted at LRA returnees but is often more a reflection of a difficult situation in which people make do with very little.

Returnees can find it hard to fit in again. Especially in non-Acholi areas such as Ikotos County, returnees' families say it was quite common for the returnees to feel extremely alienated because they had forgotten their Sudanese language – because in the LRA "if you are from another tribe, you have to talk Acholi."

Some women return from the LRA married and in some cases even with children born in the bush. In Uganda, this

has been much problematized with a focus on so-called 'child mothers'. Research has shown that 'child mothers' often went to live with the family of their LRA-husband, thus perpetuating what would be considered as traditional family structures. Similarly to what has been seen in Uganda, some female Sudanese returnees also stated they would prefer to live with their LRA husbands if they could come out of the bush, rather than stay alone.

This is different for women who were married before they were abducted. In Panyikwara, one married woman was abducted from Achol-Pii and became the wife of an LRA fighter. She gave birth to three children in the bush and returned with one child to her original husband, leaving the other two behind. She is now pregnant again from her first husband. When asked how her first husband received the child that was born in the bush, her relatives replied:

The child from the bush is now a reward for her first husband. The child is like a compensation for the husband for the time she was away. It is more important that the child was *born*, than that it was born *in the bush*. The child becomes history. People will remember it as part of history and they will say: the child was born during the LRA war.

They added that in general, the community has no problem with a child; "they have problems with grown-ups coming back."

When a child comes back, there can be a celebration if the family has the economic means. They brew some beer for the celebrations to create their happiness and a good relationship. It is exactly like the father of the prodigal son. They can step on an egg for a community celebration [a ritual performed to welcome someone home after a long time away] for somebody who was lost and is now found. Maybe people performed funeral rites already, so it is a joy to see them again.

Returnees in Panyikwara commented "it is important to take former LRA members to some course because the period they should have spent in education, they spent in the bush. And most had all their property taken, even clothes. They need to be given something back, like clothes, to make them feel like normal citizens." One returnee who was abducted from Uganda and returned to his family while they were still in Uganda commented on his return to his Sudanese home village: "When I stay here, it is difficult, people call me bad names, For me I am not taking it in a bad way. There was more name-calling in Uganda than in Sudan."

Particularly sensitive is the case of Ugandans who escape from the LRA in Sudan. At least one case of 'reverse abduction' in Eastern Equatoria has been confirmed and communities spoke of other cases. In Eastern Equatoria, a man caught an LRA girl as she was looting his household and took her in as his wife in compensation for his killed brother. The case is not talked about in the community and most people are only aware that she is Ugandan, but do not know of the LRA connection. Local authorities are careful not to reveal her background to the community for fear of revenge. Authorities would like to trace her family to at least make the marriage official, but have so far failed to do so. It was not possible to interview the woman.

## 7.2 Sudanese refugees returning to Sudan

The stream of returnees has been steady since mid-2007 and increased greatly during the first half of 2008, but vast parts of the affected areas are still deserted. Local officials in Magwi and Ikotos estimated in June 2008 that about half the population has returned to Sudan, but not necessarily to their home villages.

Returnees often choose to remain in towns, which are deemed safer than their villages. This creates problems in communities, as different levels of help are given to those who stayed in their villages during the war, those who remained displaced in Sudan and those who fled to neighbouring countries. All these returnees were affected by the same conflicts as those who stayed but have a very different experience of the conflict. It also leads to a lack of community cohesion in many towns and villages. "People have bad individual feelings," said one respondent, explaining this leads to a reluctance to move back to home villages and that is why people choose to remain as IDPs.

In 2006 and 2007, residents who stayed in the Eastern and Central Equatoria area were making the very strong point that it was vital for people to return so rebuilding and development could start. However the reality of returning has brought with it a different set of issues, which in some areas have caused tension.

Returnees and those who stayed receive different benefits. Returnees in most cases receive some services upon arrival and are complaining that the services are running out and there is "no regular feeding like in Uganda camps". Those who come from Uganda are used to a very different system of receiving provisions. After years in Ugandan camps with regular food aid deliveries, some returnees said they had been given food only for the first six months of their stay in Sudan. While it is normal to not endlessly provide relief food after repatriation, this was clearly difficult to get

used to. One returnee in Aru-Kubi said that, "in Uganda, UNHCR [sic] gives monthly food. In Sudan, food is given for six months, but since March food is finished, UNHCR will wash its hands and say: these are your people from Sudan and we fed them for six months and now we rest."

Asking returnees what they had expected to find in Sudan upon their return, the most common answers were they had thought, "that children who are learning in Uganda could continue school but there are no schools." Community needs defined by those who stayed are almost identical to what is mentioned by those who fled, with education, health services and agricultural assistance being the most common requests. However, while those who stayed stressed that people needed to come back, the reality is that scarce resources get stretched even further. One man who had recently returned from Uganda to Aru-Kubi said, "the people who stayed never welcomed us, they are also poor." He also said "we have no control for our land, and the old land is no longer here."

In Aru-Kubi, differences in provisions and unresolved land issues have led to a community divided in three. On the north side of the road live 220 households of those who remained during the war or only fled temporarily to surrounding areas. However among those households are some who are still displaced to Aru-Kubi from their original villages, yet they are not classified as IDPs, which adds further strain to their relationship with IDPs who receive initial minimal services. The south side of the road is divided into two camps: former IDPs who returned from Nimule, and refugees from Uganda. Each camp has its own commander. The chief of Aru-Kubi only considers himself responsible for the families who stayed. Each camp of people has received different assistance, leading to tensions.

Refugees from Uganda bring with them a very different set of skills and are viewed with suspicion by those who stayed, who say it seems very easy for a returnee from Uganda to get a job in local administration. A woman who received schooling in Uganda and now works in community sensitization summed up the tension this causes: "Those who came from exile are better leaders because they went to school. Those who remain do not want to be led by those who left, yet they themselves do not have the capability to do the work." This is confirmed by people who stayed and are struggling to improve their situation. Some complain about the unfair system and feel they should be given priority for any education, others — while noting the steep difference in the economic situation of returnees and those who stay — take a more conciliatory approach:

Those who come are people of this area so we welcome them and integrate them in our families. They have come with so many ideas and ideas of building new homes. Here we shall learn a lot from them to change the accommodation we are living in and how we are living in our societies. Those who returned from Nimule and Uganda came with chicken, ducks and goats. They are economically good.

All communities, however, show disillusionment with the situation in Sudan. They feel the CPA has not brought the expected improvements in security and development and they experience tension along the border every day.

# Cross-border issues

8

"Since the CPA and since peace education, we have realized Uganda and Sudan need to join hands together." *Tseretenya resident*

Marieke Schutteus



*Cattle crossing the border post at Tseretenya, heading towards Uganda.*

The border with Uganda is both a source of tension and a lifeline for residents of the Sudanese border areas. They recognize their unique position in benefiting from cross-border trade, but experiences of being attacked across the border, being encroached upon and perceptions of being treated unfairly make the border a touchy subject. One man in Ikotos County said: "We have to ensure there is a relationship. We need to connect authorities like Kitgum and Ikotos because most people here are somehow related to Uganda. So we have to talk about issues with the border. People speak similar languages as well. But the connections are also reason for tension."

People however also have good memories of living along the border. Residents of Magwi County remember how during peaceful times, the residents of Uganda's Palabek would cross into Sudan on nights with a full moon for dancing and celebrations. Market days in both countries

brought people together. Residents of Lokung and Parajok and Madi Opei and Tseretenya used to team up cross-border to go hunting.

Despite numerous cross-border meetings facilitated by church and political groups as well as NGOs on either side of the border with leaders from church, politics and civil society, the border remains a cause for concern for many residents. One reason is that peace meetings are sporadic and only happen whenever they are facilitated – they need to be ongoing to help establish lasting and meaningful relationships. Living along the border also comes with an increased presence of military, both SPLA and UPDF, and stricter controls of trade.

In the past, interviewees said, the border allowed good access to Ugandan markets in Kitgum and Lira, which were both good places to go and trade. Today, the biggest

markets are Juba and Kampala, and local markets have lost significance. Equatorians see this development as a repeat of the devastating centralization and pooling of resources in the capital they fought so hard against in the Sudanese civil war.

The border is also a passageway for armed groups. In addition to the known groups, residents report that unknown groups move between Uganda and Sudan. In early June 2008, one of these groups took two goats and local people followed their tracks but it was not clear where they were going. It could only be established that the group was large. In January, a group of Karamojong from Uganda moved in the area and locals caught one member, suspected to be surveying the area for cattle-raiding.

Women cannot travel safely on the roads between Uganda and Sudan. Up to 2007, women transporting goods back and forth were regularly robbed by, as they reported, "local Ugandans" with heavy weapons.

### **8.1 Border charges and trade**

Crossing the border has become a major point of contention. Trading is curtailed by high taxation and Sudanese are worried they will miss out on goods, education and medical care due to taxation, customs and immigration charges. They feel targeted by the Ugandan authorities, as one man in Tseretenya explained, summing up various issues the community has with the border:

It will not be only because of LRA that we need to make peace with each other. High taxation is also a problem. A student has to pay to cross the border. We cannot accept to keep students here because the schools here have a different system and the students started in Uganda and learned English. Here students learned Arabic. Only now we can start integrating the languages from lower classes. It will take us some few years. Businessmen go to Uganda to bring commodities and it brings issues of currency. Some Ugandan businessmen don't accept Sudanese pounds and they make the currency lower. And the road is bad so commodities come mainly from Uganda.

One major concern for them is that taxation and immigration charges are not predictable. Ugandan traders or contractors and other foreigners pay an entering fee into Sudan, which is higher for non-East African travellers. Sudanese travelling into Uganda passing official border posts always pay an entering fee, unless it is obvious – through a visible injury – that they are going for medical treatment. Whether small

traders on foot or bicycle pay an entering fee is apparently handled at the discretion of the border official. Border posts at Madi Opei and Tseretenya agreed in February 2008 that only traders with trucks should pay immigration charges. The fees are now fixed. The standard fee is 25,000 UGX (roughly Pound Sterling UKP 8.40 in mid-2008) to enter Uganda to travel to Kampala and this is also applied to students returning for study.

Travellers however report they routinely get charged more immigration charges. Sudanese who used to cross the border regularly for trading say it is "now very difficult because of overtaxing." In Nimule, county authorities report that the Ugandan checkpoint imposes a 35 per cent tax on trade goods. Ugandan traders also pay duty at various official checkpoints along the journey from Uganda to Juba: once upon entering Sudan and again when arriving at Juba bridge. Sudanese customs on a crate of beer, for example, can be as high as 40,000 UGX (UKP 13.40) upon entering Sudan. The crate sells on for UGX 62,500 (UKP 20.80), leaving slim profit margins, especially if further taxation occurs upon entering Juba.

In addition travellers between Uganda and Sudan are often asked to pay for travel permits several times over. Officially, only one travel permit is required and duty is fixed. In reality, the amounts of duty asked by border officials on both sides differ greatly, depending on who is on duty. As a result local small-scale trading, which could be a stabilizing factor in the border region, is discouraged. Currency trading has also further discouraged small-scale trading in goods as trading currencies becomes more profitable due to high customs charges on goods.

The Ugandan shilling is the more common currency for trading along the border, putting Sudanese at a distinct disadvantage. Currency issues and rising prices – some connected to local trade structures, others influenced by world market developments – taint the relationship between the two countries on the very local level. One man in Tseretenya explained "there is no good market or communication between Uganda and Sudan because of raising the price of commodities. And the Sudan currency is lower than that of Uganda, why is it so?"

The exchange rate has been fluctuating to the disadvantage of the Sudanese and the exchange business is firmly in the hands of mainly Ugandan traders. "We don't know the bank rate, we don't know what it should be," said one man travelling regularly to the Madi Opei market. The rate, residents say, became much worse since the Sudanese pound replaced the Dinar in 2007. It is now common to

receive 700 UGX (UKP 0.23) for 1 SP (UKP 0.26), although some traders have lowered this even more, charging 1 SP (UKP 0.26) for 500 UGX (UKP 0.17).

It is of concern to Sudanese people that the trade is so one-sided. Sudanese have only few items they can trade in Uganda. Their main goods for trading are chicken and goats, which are in demand in Madi Opei. Because of limited amounts, the trade is not sustainable and has negative effects. One man explained that "we now have few chickens, only small ones because we have sold them all for food in Uganda." Often chicken are exchanged for alcohol with no improvement to the nutrition situation. The other tradable commodity is honey, which because it is seasonal provides an unreliable income.

## 8.2 Disputed border

In various parts along the border, namely in Tsereteny and Parajok, residents feel under threat by Ugandan forces moving closer to the border and into territory they consider Sudanese. Local border officials in Tsereteny and Parajok confirmed the border is being slowly and subtly pushed into Sudan. In Ngom Oromo, near Parajok, residents say the Ugandan forces have moved into Sudan, encroaching the border 15km from the river towards Parajok. In Tsereteny, an acacia tree that used to demarcate the middle of land distance between the two border posts at Tsereteny in Sudan and Madi Opei in Uganda was now being used by Ugandan border officials as their customs point, effectively pushing the border 5km north.

Between Madi Opei and Tsereteny, residents at Lositi report that the UPDF has moved one mile into Sudan and has also used gunships against some Toposa in Sudan while claiming to pursue Karamojong. The executive director of Ikotos County reports that he went to ask the UPDF to move back but has not been informed about how his message was received. Other residents of Ikotos County say the "worst thing is that Uganda keeps changing the border. Sometimes you find soldiers from Uganda where the border should be. They are pushing the border into Sudan inland. The demarcated area is not well known although we know it." In Oguru people reported signposts demarcating the border had been removed "by the Ugandan government, but they do it with a military force."

A border official in Tsereteny explained that the "people of Uganda have now penetrated inside our land and this is a threat to our community. It is occupation of our land. They want to move the acacia tree and the UPDF already moved there." Another said, "border encroachment is a

problem because people fear encroachment means that people get arrested if they move in the border area." In Katire *payam*, a village is literally split between two countries: Lomwaka South is in Uganda while Lomwaka North is in Sudan. But local people say Uganda has now started to tax Lomwaka North, prompting residents to file a petition with the local government.

A *payam* administrator in Ikotos County elaborated that the community felt it had exhausted its means to protest and was now left to watch helplessly as Uganda claimed their land:

The community reported this to our government but the government said we should wait. But where will our children live? The border is now up to Limur River and this is a threat. It will be like Abyei [the disputed region on the Sudanese north-south border] and our children will suffer high taxes at the border. There are five officers collecting taxes at the border, and we don't know where the money goes. No percentage is given to the *payam*, although we have a customs officer.

Such incidents only add to the community's perception that the UPDF is not about protecting them but, as one person said, "maybe UPDF is also about 2011", meaning Southern Sudan is keeping its allies in the country ahead of the 2011 referendum on its independence. On June 2, 2008, residents report that the UPDF entered Lofus and asked for payment of taxes but the community could effectively refuse. The community has now asked authorities to enforce the 1947 borders and that both armies, UPDF and SPLA, stay away from the border to make residents feel safer.

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# Appendix

## 10.1 Number of semi-structured interviews conducted in June 2008

	Total	Male	Female
<b>Magwi County</b>			
Panyikwara	15	7	8
Magwi Town	17	9	8
Obbo	12	7	5
Pajok (Parajok)	21	16	5
<b>Ikotos County</b>			
Ikotos	4	3	1
Imatong Centre	5	4	1
Lohayiro village	4	2	2
Tseretenya	17	10	7
<b>Juba County</b>			
Lyria	11	7	4
Lokiliri boma	15	15	0
Sodoni	5	4	1
Aru-Kubi IDPs	19	8	11
Aru Kubi	24	21	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>56</b>

## **10.2 The impact of war in Sudan on families in Eastern and Central Equatoria**

The table gives an overview of how many people died in the war in the families of the interviewees. It shows the total of family members killed among all interviewees, rather than breaking it down to individuals. It indicates the extent to which communities have been affected.

<b>Place/total number of interviews</b>	<b>Family members killed by LRA</b>	<b>Family members who died as soldiers</b>	<b>Died as civilian war casualties killed by soldiers/bombs</b>	<b>Died from illness/malnutrition</b>	<b>Killed by OAG</b>
Aru-Kubi IDPs (19)	34	22	2	10	
Aru Kubi (24)	20	13		6	
Panyikwara (15)	12	7	5	3	1
Magwi Town (17)	6	8	1		
Obbo (12)	2	8	6		
Parajok (21)	23	3	13		
Ikotos (4)	36				
Imatong (5)	31				
Lohayiro village (4)	50	2	4	1	
Tseretenya (17)	25	2	5	5	1
Lyria (11)	12	4	14	11	1
Lokiliri boma (15)	17	3	2		
Sodoni (5)	4	1	2		

### **10.3 Family members missing and returned**

The table below shows the number of family members missing in the families of the interviewees. Interviewees used different definitions of family, some only referred to their immediate families, while others quoted cases from their extended families. It also shows the number of family members who have returned and under which circumstances they have returned. All in all, the answers indicate that the numbers of people abducted might be higher than previously assumed, although this allows no conclusion as to how many Sudanese are currently with the LRA.

<b>Total number of interviewees</b>	<b>Still missing</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Returned when?</b>
Aru-Kubi IDPs (19)	7	2	Interviewee was herself abducted in 1996 to carry goods for three days
Aru Kubi (24)	10	1	One girl returned on September 15, 2003
Panyikwara (15)	1	5	Two siblings were taken in the bush 1994, but returned in the same year
Magwi Town (17)	4 (1 abducted by SPLA)	1	
Obbo (12)		1	
Parajok (21)	4	4	One wife came back after 6 months in 1994  One woman returned after one week with LRA in 2004  One man spent one day with LRA in 2006  Son and daughter taken in Uganda in 1989, returned same day
Ikotos (4)	13		
Imatong (5)	14		
Lohayiro village (4)	30 (11 by LRA, 19 by SPLA)	1	
Tseretenya (17)	8	1	
Lyria (11)	4 (one missing in war, not abducted)	2	One child returned by Murle in 2007  One woman returned after short time with LRA in 2004
Lokiliri boma (15)	6 (one taken by SAF in 1987)		
Sodoni (5)	1 (missing since 1987)	1	Interviewee carried loot for LRA in 2002
Total number of family members missing from families of 169	102		

## Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the help of many people. I am indebted to Angela Aciro Onorio, Wani Vitaliano Luka Tira and Lokia Dominic Kingbruse Tobiolo for their research work and guidance. Thanks also go to Simon Kabab who briefly joined our research team in Magwi. Our trusted driver Solomon SSekadde braved the potholes in good humour. In all of the places visited, we were received warmly and were assisted by local residents and leaders. Kennedy Tumutegyereize and Caesar Poblicks of Conciliation Resources were both inspirational. Thank you also to Catherine Barnes, Celia McKeon and Melissa Jones for their valuable editorial input.

I thank all the interviewees who gave their time and insight. For some, these were very difficult issues to talk about. I am grateful that they did.

Conciliation Resources is an independent charity with over a decade of experience working internationally to prevent and resolve violent conflict, promote justice and build lasting peace. Our practical work is guided by the needs of people living in countries affected or threatened by war. We currently work in the Caucasus, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Uganda and Sudan, and are involved in projects in Colombia, Fiji and the Philippines. We also publish *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives*.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
EDF	Equatoria Defence Forces
IDP	Internally displaced person
LRA/M	Lord's Resistance Army/ Movement
OAG	Other Armed Groups
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/ Movement
SP	Sudanese pounds
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UGX	Ugandan shillings
UKP	UK Pound Sterling
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

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